

Lower Grant Brook Trail

Lyme, New Hampshire

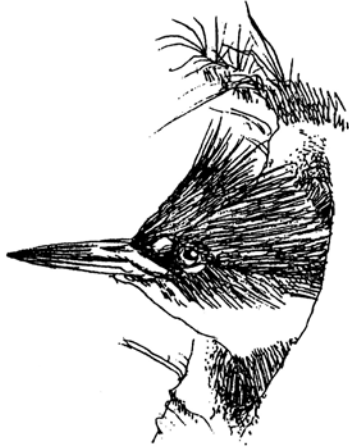


illustration c. Joan Waltermire

This 300-acre preserve is a conservation success story, which began in 1988 when Clyde Grant placed a conservation easement on nine acres along the brook bearing his ancestors' name. A decade later, the Upper Valley Land Trust assembled many partners, from Lyme neighbors and organizations to federal agencies, to protect the rest of his estate and the entire 1 ½ mile stream corridor from Lyme village to the Connecticut River. The Audubon Society of NH manages UVLT's property around Lyme Hill.

Grant Brook falls 2500 feet from its source on Smarts Mt. through the villages of Lyme Center and Lyme Plain, delivering runoff gathered from its 10 square mile watershed to the broad Connecticut.

The gentle trail from Lyme School to the River is a 1.4 mile one way trip, or 2.5 miles via Gilbert Cemetery. Much of it follows an early road along the brook, through meadows and pastures, past old bridges, along cool alleys of hemlock, and, by a side trail, to the secluded peace of Lyme's first cemetery.

History

The site of Lyme's last operating grist mill (burned 1933) is just upstream from the bridge to Brook Lane. The handsome brick cape above the pasture is the Grant homestead. By the early 1770s, Benjamin Grant had built Lyme's first grist mill along the brook, and was grinding flour for his neighbors. At the wooden bridge, look for the dry-laid stone foundations of a much earlier bridge. The old road along the brook was once Lyme's main artery, where horse teams hauled logs to the river. Gilbert Cemetery holds Lyme's first family, the Sloans, and several Revolutionary War soldiers. Some stones date from the 1780s. Please do not disturb them.

Geology

Grant Brook gives a glimpse of the bones of this land. Above the meadow, the stream is pebbly and flat, disguising the deeper bedrock, revealed near the wooden bridge. Here the water spills over dark rocks split by diagonal fractures. These are the folded, compressed remains of a volcanic sea floor caught 600 million years ago between the colliding continents of ancient North America and Africa. When Africa retreated, it left a bit behind, clinging to Vermont - now New Hampshire and Maine.

Habitat

The intersection of large and small rivers and varying rock and soil types offers rich and diverse habitat, inviting many creatures, as it invited Lyme's first family. Accommodations range from the deep shade and winter harbor of hemlocks to bright meadows, dry hillsides, and cattail marshes where the brook meets the

river. On a single June day, Audubon Society members identified 216 species here: 58 species of birds, 76 plants, 28 trees, and 40 insects. Over 300 species of plants live here, including 12 which are considered threatened or endangered.

Migratory waterfowl rest in calm shallows at the brook's mouth, both here and in the state-owned Wilder Wildlife Management Area just downstream. The habitat offered by these "setbacks" on the Connecticut River is considered nationally significant. Otter, beaver, wood duck, green heron, wood turtles, and kingfishers are frequent here, while bear, fox, deer, turkey, hawks, and songbirds find shelter in the uplands. Look for sign of pileated woodpeckers along the brook. The yellow throated vireo and Louisiana water thrush nest here at the northern edge of their range, drawn into the sphere of the larger river.

Please . . .

This trail crosses private property belonging to landowners who have generously granted public access. Please close farm gates behind you. Muscle-powered travel only. No motorized vehicles except on designated snowmobile routes. Dogs are welcome if they are under the control of their owners. Leave flowers and other plants growing where you found them. And please, carry out what you carry in.

Directions

From the east: park at Lyme School. Walk through the playground and across a swale and athletic fields to the marked trail head at the stone wall.

From the west: travel 0.7 miles south on River Rd. from E. Thetford Rd. Trail begins at lane just north of the bridge. Please park with courtesy to residents. Trails are marked with yellow arrows and signs.

